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SUBJECT: WOMEN IN GHANA'S DEVELOPMENT - ACHIEVEMENTS AND OBSTACLES

Ref: Accra 2443

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Women have contributed significantly to Ghana's social and economic development since its independence fifty years ago. They play a critical role in agriculture, Ghana's largest economic sector, and are responsible for most of the nation's food production. In recent years, Ghana has also made noticeable progress in girls' enrollment rates at school. Despite these achievements, various obstacles impede women's contribution to Ghana's development, such as exclusion from national processes, limited access to economic assets, and inadequate training in financial management and business planning. Gender inequalities in higher education, health and decision-making power, also frustrate women's full participation in economic, political and social life.
END SUMMARY.

WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE ECONOMY - LOOKING BACK

12. (SBU) Historically, Ghanaian women have been under-represented in the public sector, although in recent years several women have been appointed to high-level political positions. [NOTE: Women's role in Ghanaian politics and civil society was reported reftel. END NOTE] Moreover, their important contributions to Ghana's economy resulted in a temporary backlash several decades ago. According to the Acting Commissioner of the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), Anna Bossman, successful female traders who dominated public markets in the late 1970s were physically abused and socially ostracized for their significant economic power, and were blamed for fiscal problems that troubled the nation at the time. As a result, Bossman says, some women became withdrawn and hesitant about actively participating in the public economic and social arenas.

13. (SBU) Notwithstanding these setbacks, women have played, and continue to play, a key role in sustaining Ghana's economy. In the view of Angela Dwamena-Aboagye, a Ghanaian women's rights advocate and Executive Director of the Ark Foundation, women often provide "stopgaps" during periods of economic crises, by supporting their husbands and families and doing any kind of work that is needed to ensure that their children go to school. In terms of unpaid activities, Ghanaian women continue to assume primary responsibility for childrearing, cooking, washing and collecting fuel and water. It should be noted, however, that Ghana's ethnic, socio-economic, religious and regional diversity mean that the role and status of women varies significantly from one community to the next.

WOMEN IN GHANA'S ECONOMY TODAY

14. (SBU) More than three-fourths of all Ghanaians in the labor force are working in the informal private sector, of which 53% are women, according to the 2000 Census. This dominance of the informal sector makes it difficult to accurately determine relative contributions to gross domestic product (GDP). Nevertheless, it is clear that women are critical contributors to all three sectors that account for most of Ghana's GDP: agriculture, industry, and services. According to Jane Quayle, Executive Director of the International Federation of

Women Lawyers (FIDA) in Ghana, women are key actors in all stages of the food chain, especially food production and small-scale farming. As such, they are largely responsible for food security in Ghana. In addition to dominating the manufacturing sub-sector (within industry) and wholesale/retail trade (within services), some successful female entrepreneurs have emerged in marketing, banking, and other commercial industries.

¶15. (SBU) Women are increasingly the head of Ghanaian households, in part because of divorce, spousal separation of residences due to seasonal rural/urban migration, and polygamy. However, at least in the lower ends of the economic spectrum, this is not an economic handicap. To the contrary, according to the Ghana Statistical Service's "Pattern and Trends of Poverty in Ghana 1991-2006," the percentage of female-headed households living in poverty is lower than that found among male-headed households - and the population as a whole. In 2005-2006, 19% of female-headed households fell below the poverty line, while 31% of male-headed households and 28.5% of the total population fell in that category. This aggregate situation is not new. In 1991-1992, poverty among female-headed households was 43% compared to 55% among male-headed households and nearly 52% for the population as a whole. There has, however, been a change in the urban-rural picture. The rate of poverty among female-headed households in rural areas declined relatively more than among male-headed households, dropping 30 percentage points to 26% while poverty among male-headed households in rural areas declined only 23 percentage points to 66%. In urban areas, the status of male-headed households has improved at a slightly faster rate than female-headed households and poverty rates are now virtually the same at 10.9% and 10.7%, respectively.

WOMEN IN EDUCATION

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¶16. (SBU) In addition to achievements in overall poverty reduction, progress has also been made in achieving the education-related Millennium Development Goals. According to USAID-Ghana, the Gross Enrollment Rate for girls in primary schools - that is, the total enrollment in primary schools expressed as a percentage of the population in the official age group in this grade level - increased from 75% in FY2003 to 89% in FY2006. Moreover, the Gender Parity Index - that is, the female to male ratio - in primary schools has increased from .93 to .96 over the same period.

¶17. (SBU) Although school enrollment and retention rates have increased for both girls and boys, the gender gap persists at higher grade levels. In its 2006 Concluding Comments on Ghana, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women reported that girls represent 33% and 22% of enrolled students in secondary and tertiary education, respectively, and have high drop-out rates in part because of gender discrimination. In addition, limited access to financial management skills, credit, and technology further impede women's ability to contribute to Ghana's economy. Women's under-representation at higher grade levels and persisting illiteracy rates for women in turn limit their choices in employment.

OBSTACLES IMPEDING THE CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN

¶18. (SBU) Aside from women's under-representation in high-level decision making positions (reftel), health for women is a major obstacle. The maternal mortality rate of 540 per 100,000 live births has not declined in the past decade. Child health, especially under five mortality, has increased from 108 to 111 per 1000 since 1998 due to increases in the neonatal mortality rate and a slight increase in post-neonatal rates. While the HIV infection rate in the adult population in Ghana is relatively low (less than 3%), the Ghana AIDS Commission Program Work Plan for 2007 reports that the incidence of HIV/AIDS is higher for women than men, with about 63% of infected persons being women and girls. [NOTE: This difference can probably be explained in large measure due to very high rates of male circumcision in Ghana, which provides significant protection to them. END NOTE] Girls and women also face

discrimination in household nutrition and health care, exacerbating the health issues facing women and girl-children.

¶9. (SBU) As in other societies, Ghanaian women's traditional roles at home have additional negative effects on their economic and social advancement. According to a 2004 study conducted by the research institute Friedrich Ebert Stiftung on "The Role of Women in Ghana's Economy," women devote a great deal of time to childcare responsibilities and often have a large number of children - all factors that restrict their job choices, work productivity, and mobility. Additional obstacles to progress include discriminatory customary practices and social tolerance of domestic violence, prostitution, and sexual harassment in the workforce. In addition, traditional systems often limit women's role making decisions related to economic development and inheritance claims, especially with regards to land.

BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR GHANAIAN WOMEN

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT: Despite progress made in Ghanaian women's contribution to development, continuing gender inequalities have a negative impact on a number of critical development areas, including economic growth, democracy and health. To overcome the obstacles will require policies that proactively empower women to participate in the economy, education and politics by facilitating their access to secondary and tertiary education, providing credit to women-owned businesses, and improving women's health. This will also require socio-cultural changes that give Ghanaian women equal decision-making power within traditional communities, the public sphere, and at home. END COMMENT

BRIDGEWATER